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Public administration perspective on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note by the Secretariat serves as a background paper for the deliberations and recommendations of the Committee of Experts on the Public Administration on the public administration perspective on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development. The annual ministerial review of the 2008 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council will address progress made by Member States in this area.

This document contains six sections. The introduction highlights the importance of sustainable development and climate change today. The second section outlines governance and public administration challenges that countries face in translating to the national level the global consensus on sustainable development and adapting to climate change. The third explores how new or reformed public institutions, partnerships, structures and processes can best meet those challenges. The fourth section identifies capacity development needs of Governments in creating an enabling environment for sustainable development and adapting to climate change. The fifth presents, in response to the interest expressed by Member States on implementation, case studies and examples of practices that have worked in selected countries. The document concludes with policy recommendations for consideration, adoption and follow-up by the Economic and Social Council, the Member States and the United Nations Secretariat.

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I. Introduction

1. Exploring the governance and public administration challenges that countries face in translating the global consensus on sustainable development and climate change into national development agendas is a complex task, inasmuch as the needs and challenges of regions and countries with respect to sustainable development and climate change are diverse, and subject to distinct social, political and economic governance parameters. The complexities notwithstanding, the present note seeks to provide an overall picture of current and planned efforts and practices in integrating sustainable development issues into public administration, with particular emphasis on climate change and its close relationship with sustainable development, by focusing on the mainstreaming of sustainable development principles in policymaking, and analysing resource allocation needs of countries in the economic, social and environmental domains.

2. Maintaining the physical environment is vital not only for human well-being but also for economic and social progress. Defined as encompassing paths and patterns of development that ensure the meeting of present needs without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations, sustainable development is conspicuously related to intergenerational equity. In this regard, one of the key principles (principle 4) of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,[1] adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit"), stated that environmental protection must be an integral part of the development process instead of being treated as a separate component. According to another key principle of the Rio Declaration, achieving sustainable development requires both eradicating poverty in the developing world, and making lifestyles in the developed world less damaging to the environment. Hence, sustainable development is a broad-based concept, which integrates social, economic and environmental dimensions into the overall development context.

3. It was within the context of this understanding that the United Nations Climate Change Conference was organized. The Conference, which was held in Bali, Indonesia, from 3 to 14 December 2007, culminated in (a) the successful launching of negotiations on a climate change agreement at the global level; (b) a consensus on the agenda for the negotiations; and (c) agreement on completing those negotiations by 2009. As such, the Bali road map envisages that Governments around the world will begin immediately to address key environmental challenges, inter alia, climate adaptation, the dissemination of clean technologies, and combating deforestation.

4. In addition to the outcomes of the Earth Summit and the Bali Climate Change Conference, the Millennium Development Goals are also crucial for environment and sustainable development. The Millennium Development Goals are a global compact for poverty reduction and sustainable social development. In contrast to previous development agendas, the Millennium Development Goals also entail time-bound quantitative targets for specific development goals and objectives. Goal 7 is to "Ensure environmental sustainability".

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

II. The Millennium Development Goals and the governance environment required for the implementation of Goal 7

5. Goal 7 has four targets. The first main target, which is to "Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources", calls for coordinated action of all governance actors, including the government, civil society organizations and the market at all levels. The second is to "Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation". Success in meeting these water-related needs would have large spillover benefits for human development and should be an integral objective of all national development strategies. The third main target, which is "By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers", recognizes and gives special attention to the rising challenges of urbanization and urban poverty within the nexus of environmental sustainability.

6. One of the main challenge for the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 7 is to create a system of governance that promotes, supports and sustains development holistically, that is to say, a system of governance that promotes economic growth, reduces poverty, supports social equity, and upholds environmental sustainability all at the same time. These multiple goals of development, which often compete with one another in the short run, warrant governance arrangements that mainstream the requirements of each, strategically and holistically. It is particularly important to mainstream environmental concerns, such as those related to water and desertification, and poverty reduction, including both rural and urban poverty, with particular attention to the sui generis case of sub-Saharan Africa, coastal areas and small island developing States.

A. Climate change, including water and desertification issues

7. Climate change can slow the pace of progress towards sustainable development, either directly through increased exposure to its adverse impact, or indirectly through erosion of the capacity to adapt. At the same time, sustainable development can reduce the vulnerability to climate change by enhancing adaptive capacity and increasing resilience. For the purposes of sustainable development, the two most urgent responses to climate change which require immediate attention are (a) the adoption of tools, policies, techniques that will arrest or mitigate the current and future negative impacts of climate change, and (b) preparations for better adaptation to the non-reversible effects of climate change that have already occurred or have yet to occur. Governments need to be fully aware of these challenges, and rearrange their governance arrangements, reallocate their resources and re-examine their macroeconomic frameworks towards mainstreaming approaches to confronting these two immediate challenges.

8. Desertification is a major environmental problem which is advancing at an alarming pace. Land degradation affects more than 1 billion people and 40 per cent of the Earth's surface. In the severest cases, land becomes infertile and useless, precipitating famine and drought. Every year, 12 million hectares of land are lost to desertification, and the rate of loss is increasing. Desertification leads to prolonged episodes of drought and famine in countries that are already impoverished and

cannot afford large agricultural losses. The world's poorest countries, where people depend much more on the land for their survival, are hit the hardest. Poverty, intense competition over resources and political instability in developing countries exacerbate the problem. Desertification and land degradation can be addressed, inter alia, by efforts to mitigate the effects of droughts and floods, and through such measures as improved use of climate and weather information and forecast, early warning systems, land and natural resources management, better agricultural practices, and enhanced conservation of the ecosystem.

9. Climate change impacts not only land but also water. Overutilization of water flows can trigger an environmental crisis, as it can result in drastic deterioration of water quality and human health, scaled desertification and soil salinity, as well as a decrease in biological and landscape variety. The fact that, as a result of decrease in water supplies, poor people tend to migrate to mountainous areas results in deforestation, soil erosion and mountain degradation. Frequently, the lack of proper transboundary agreements and management arrangements for the sharing of water resources leads to worsening vulnerability of the ecological and socio-economic systems.

B. The poverty and environment nexus

10. The poor depend on the environment in multiple ways. In many parts of the developing world, the health and productivity of the poor depend on environmental quality. Natural resources also contribute to non-cash sources of income for the poor. The poor living in rural areas often rely for their own survival on unprotected forests, fisheries and other natural resources. The poor living in urban areas lack access to clean water, fresh air and suitable sanitation systems and, in many cases, are exposed to solid and hazardous wastes, with diseases and exacerbation of poverty being the result.

11. Until recently, the challenges of poverty and environmental protection were treated as separate issues. Now, the direct and diverse linkages between poverty and environment are better recognized. For example, at the World Summit for Social Development held in 1995, world leaders acknowledged the strong and mutually reinforcing linkages among economic development, social development and environmental protection. Furthermore, in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21,[2] adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session on 28 June 1997, it was decided that poverty eradication should be an overriding goal of sustainable development.

C. Urban poverty and slum-dwellers

12. Most of the urban poor live in slums. More than 900 million people currently live in urban slums and the number is growing as rapid urbanization continues in the developing world. Globally, the slum population is set to grow at the rate of 27 million per year in the period 2000-2020. With the world's urban population set to exceed the population of rural dwellers for the first time in 2007, slum-dwellers

[2] General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.

are as badly affected, if not worse off, than their rural counterparts in terms of health, literacy and prosperity.

D. Sub-Saharan Africa

13. Sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world and one where development is most impeded by vector-borne diseases, which are linked to a wide range of environmental conditions including water contamination and inadequate sanitation, as well as desertification and land degradation. Millions of the poorest people in this region live on marginal and ecologically fragile land. The United Nations Millennium Declaration[3] and the outcomes of subsequent global conferences have thus devoted special attention to Africa.

E. Small island developing States

14. Islands, particularly small islands, face a variety of short- and long-term environmental hazards, which impede their development. They are especially vulnerable to damage to their infrastructure and productive capacity from more frequent and increasingly severe natural disasters. As the result of climate change, the risk of the rise of the water level, and the frequency of cyclones, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc., have increased manyfold. These affect the lives and livelihoods of people living in small island countries and in coastal areas, especially the poor, the elderly, women and children. Countries need to give special attention to this particular aspect of the challenge arising from climate change.

III. Sustainable development and climate change: key governance issues and mainstreaming

15. There are three key governance issues related to sustainable development and the mainstreaming of adaptation to climate change into public administration. First, within the environmental dimension, awareness must be built vis-à-vis clean and renewable energy sources, taking into account deforestation and ozone layer depletion due to carbon emissions. Within the economic dimension, it is crucial to plan and implement growth strategies that are less polluting, with adequate regulatory frameworks for industries in various sectors, and fiscal incentives for the private sector, as well as alliances with businesses on industrial and investment strategies and methodologies, including those geared towards the scaling up of programmes and activities designed to leverage clean technologies. The third (social) dimension of mainstreaming puts emphasis on the risks faced by the most vulnerable and less empowered social groups and countries in pursuing sustainable development. Climate change has the greatest effect on the poor, the elderly, women and indigenous populations. Geographically, climate change is also affecting the most vulnerable regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and those small islands in which lie developing States.

[3] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

16. Within all three dimensions of sustainable development, there are two discernible levels of action. At the national level, management and stewardship of natural resources, with future generations in mind, are essential. At the transnational level, coordination and treaty formation within the framework of regional and international conventions and agreements on the use of the global commons, including the participation of all stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations, universities, foundations and transnational firms engaged in or contemplating involvement in greenhouse emissions mitigation projects, can be critical.

17. The implications of the challenges described above for governance and public administration are complex, and require mainstreaming of the issues, through improved inter-agency coordination, into the overall planning and development processes of government. Governments are seeking new structures, processes and mechanisms and tools through which to promote sustainable development. New forms of governance, designed to supplement traditional State-led top-down decision-making processes, are emerging. Several recent instruments, such as national sustainable development strategies, poverty reduction strategy papers and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, have helped prioritize poverty reduction, as well as other economic, social and environmental goals in legislative and regulatory frameworks, in various parts of the world, particularly the least developed countries.

18. Although, many countries have now established multi-stakeholder decision-making processes and institutions such as national councils for sustainable development and national economic and social councils to assist in integrated decision-making, the fact remains that some of these councils are either organizationally or politically weak or have yet to grasp the challenges of sustainable development, including the risks of climate change, and thus have not mainstreamed these issues into their deliberations. Furthermore, many countries have yet to develop similar multi-stakeholder or participatory processes at the local government and/or community level.

19. The issues and questions that these countries confront are multifarious. The governance challenges relating to sustainable development, including climate change, entail:

- How to raise the debate at the national level and increase awareness and secure political commitment
- How to bring the environment, economic and social pillars together within the given government structure
- How to mainstream sustainable development principles, including environmental concerns, into the overall planning and development processes of the government
- How to ensure the coordination (among ministries, agencies, special units, parliaments, donor Governments, and United Nations actors and organizations) necessary to integrate environment and development
- What implementation capacities or processes have to be developed at the national, subnational, local government and community levels

- What mechanisms, tools, strategies and indicators should be used to measure progress defined in terms of both the outcomes achieved and the effectiveness of processes leading to those outcomes.

A. Environmental mainstreaming into planning and implementation processes

20. Mainstreaming environment into national planning and implementation processes is one of the key governance challenges. Mainstreaming encompasses the processes by which environmental considerations, including climate change, are brought to the attention of organizations and individuals involved in decision-making on the economic, social and physical development of a country. In this regard, the focus should be on how environmental considerations are to be included in policy, plan and programme decision-making and implementation in all sectors (including for example, industrial development, financial structures, energy, health, transport, education, defence, etc.) rather than on simply raising the profile of environmental policies within government and institutional agendas.

21. A recent analysis of 20 cases from European Union (EU) and non-EU countries led to the identification of three key models of the processes, institutions and communication mechanisms utilized for integration of sustainable development into policies: the constitutional/legislative model, the process/strategy model, and the ad hoc institutional model.

Constitutional/legislative model

22. This model includes specific legal provisions for environmental protection and integration in a country's constitution, "consolidated" legislation (use of generic or framework cross-sectoral legislation), and legislation that imposes duties on public bodies.

Process/strategy model

23. This model encompasses a coordinated multi-stakeholder or Government-led strategy for sustainable development. Some examples are greening government, national sustainable development strategies, local Agenda 21 and land-use planning.

Ad hoc institutional model

24. This model may exist outside of a centrally coordinated strategy. It includes audit committees/independent auditors, environmental protection agencies and authorities, national commissions/councils for sustainable development and round tables.

25. In reality, a mixture of these elements can be found in each country studied. From the literature review and the surveys carried out, the following possible "tools" for achieving varying degrees of integration of the environment at the policy level were identified:

- Strategic environmental assessment
- Strategic environmental analysis
- E-test

- Environmental appraisal/audit
- Sustainability appraisal/assessment
- Integrated environmental assessment
- Economic tools/instruments
- Green accounting
- Environmental management systems
- Objectives, targets and indicators
- Environmental monitoring and reporting
- Public participation, education and awareness-raising
- Matrices/appraisal tables.

B. Mainstreaming adaptation to climate change

26. Adaptation to climate change is not treated as an integral part of most countries' national development plans. Both developed and developing counties are responding to the adaptation challenges principally through project-based institutional structures operating outside macroeconomic policy frameworks and budget systems. In many developing countries, adaptation planning is carried out in environment ministries, which have a limited influence on other ministries, notably finance ministries. Although some projects on climate change adaptation are delivering results, project-based mechanisms cannot provide a foundation for scaling up adaptation at the pace or with the quality required. It is thus essential to shift to a policy-based framework that is integrated into wider national planning and implementation.

C. Promoting coordination mechanisms

27. The promotion of coordination mechanisms at the national and local levels should include: (a) sectoral coordination (ministries, agencies; special units; parliament); (b) outreach to other national stakeholders (civil society organizations, academic/scientific institutions, the private sector); (c) coordination with international cooperation agencies (Government-donor coordination, bilateral and multilateral); and (d) coordination among the national, subnational and local government authorities.

28. The coordination required between sectoral ministries and agencies regarding the integration of sustainable development concerns into development plans involves policymakers at every level, and cuts across a range of sector activities and institutions. A number of countries are innovating and experimenting with the establishment of processes and structures that enable such a complex coordination, including special units, interdepartmental task forces, etc. For example, the National Environment Protection Agency of Afghanistan is working on integrating environmental considerations into the National Development Strategy of the Government of Afghanistan which is also its poverty reduction strategy paper. The National Environment Protection Agency is developing its strategy, and reviewing

ministerial strategies from other ministries, from an environmental perspective. Also, as mandated by law, the National Environment Protection Agency established the Inter-ministerial Committee for Environment Coordination.

IV. Capacities for creating an enabling environment for sustainable development

29. Limited human and financial resources, and differentials in resources and skills between different government ministries and agencies, influence the capacity to respond to new requirements, including the streamlining of the environmental, climate change and sustainability issues. These impediments are not specific to the sustainability issue, but are common to all cross-cutting concerns, such as environment, poverty, gender, etc. Implementing cross-cutting policies requires that (a) new issues be championed; (b) ways be found to mainstream them into existing processes; and (c) new capacities be developed.

30. In order to effectively mainstream sustainable development principles and concerns into national planning and implementation processes, it is necessary to build capacities at the individual and institutional levels. Planners and management specialists need to learn about the guiding principles, methodological approaches and legislative requirements in their respective professional fields. They need to be trained through short courses, continuing education programmes, and teamwork. Raising awareness of politicians, non-governmental organizations and community groups participating in the mainstreaming processes is also necessary in order for the vision, strategies, programmes and projects that emanate from the planning processes to become fully owned and implemented successfully. Mainstreaming of the emerging issues of sustainable development and climate change may also require the restructuring of departments and the reforming of the existing institutional arrangements so that adaptation processes become more integrative and holistic.

V. Case studies: practices in selected countries

A. South Africa: mainstreaming environmental sustainability into the integrated development planning process

31. The law reform process that has taken place in South Africa since 1994 has moved environmental sustainability concerns squarely into the Government's policy agenda. The consideration of sustainability principles and environmental management issues in planning, development and decision-making activities across all sectors and at all levels is now required by law. Local government has become the intended focal point for addressing the socio-economic needs of local communities and sustainable service delivery, with the principal tool for achieving these developmental objectives being the Integrated Development Plan.

32. The Integrated Development Plan process represents a significant swing away from past planning approaches in South Africa which were largely technocratic and sectoral. Increasingly, Integrated Development Plans exhibit a strong shift towards a more integrated and participatory approach to local planning. The legal requirement

that all sectors and interested parties be consulted has led to improved communication and cooperation between different sectors and spheres of government, and between traditional authorities and the newly established local authority structures.

33. There has been a convergence over time of (a) the legal requirements for addressing sustainability and environmental management concerns and (b) the legal requirements for planning and implementation. This is particularly the case with respect to Integrated Development Plans at the local government level, where not only are the aims of Integrated Development Plans compatible with environmental concerns but the processes for their preparation and the intended outcomes are closely aligned with the principles of sustainability. There is also a high degree of compatibility of the Local Agenda 21 approaches promoted internationally with South Africa's required Integrated Development Plan approaches.

34. In response to the recent assessment of the limited extent to which environmental sustainability issues were being incorporated in Integrated Development Plan processes, the national framework document entitled "Strengthening environmental sustainability in the IDP process" was prepared to provide guidance. It is argued that, while this is a start, those involved in promoting environmental management and sustainability in South African local government need to go further and to fully understand the nature of planning, including the processes, language and tools of planners, as well as the range of choices and decisions that planners and managers are required to make at each stage of the Integrated Development Plan process.

B. Germany: mainstreaming adaptation to climate change into national planning

35. Large areas of Germany face, with climate change, increased risk of flooding. Research in the Neckar Catchment area in Baden-Wuettemberg and Bavaria predicts an increase of 40-50 per cent in small and medium-sized flood events by the 2050s, with a 15 per cent increase in "100 year" floods. The Baden-Wuettemberg ministry for environment estimated the additional cost of long-term flood defence infrastructure at US$ 685 million. Following large-scale flooding in 2002 and 2003, Germany adopted a Flood Control Articles Act, which integrates climate change assessment into national planning and imposes strict requirements on the designation of flood areas and human settlements.

C. Small island developing States: mainstreaming adaptation to climate change

36. Small island developing States have already demonstrated leadership in adapting to climate change. Faced with climate change risks that touch on all aspects of social, economic and ecological life, their Governments have developed an integrated response linking national and regional planning and implementation. In the Caribbean, the Mainstreaming Adaptation to Climate Change programme was initiated in 2002 to promote integration of adaptation and climate risk management strategies into water resource management, tourism, fisheries, agriculture and other areas. In the Pacific, the Government of Kiribati has joined with donors to integrate

climate change into national planning, working through high-level ministerial committees. A two-year preparation phase (2003-2005) has been followed by a three-year implementation period, during which donors are co-financing incremental climate change adaptation spending in key areas.

VI. Recommendations

A. For Member States

37. **Political commitment and partnership are keys to the success of sustainable development. It is thus crucial that both the national and the local political leadership express their commitment to the processes of sustainable development while effectively collaborating with each other and other stakeholders at all levels and in all sectors. Consideration may be given to linking the multi-stakeholder networks within countries where strategic planning commissions or economic and social councils exist. The scope and composition of these commissions and councils and the use of information and communications technology in the process of integration can be increased and strengthened.**

38. **As a follow-up to the Bali process, it is important to integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation policies into national development agendas. This integration should not be piecemeal and selective, but rapid and comprehensive. With this aim in mind, adaptation and mitigation policies and measures, including various forms of fiscal incentives and disincentives, should be directed towards sustainable development. Instruments such as strategic environmental assessments and environmental impact assessments can support programme, project or investment decision-making, as appropriate. Adequate assistance should be provided to the most vulnerable countries, and the adaptive capacity of developing countries should be buttressed. Meeting the basic energy needs of the poor, including by increasing access to energy, without contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, should be a priority.**

39. **Progress on climate change will require improved governance, including an active civil society and open, transparent and accountable policy and decision-making processes. In this framework, building capacity for mainstreaming poverty-sustainable development linkages into national development planning processes such as the poverty reduction strategies (PRS) and Millennium Development Goals achievement strategies is important. In this regard, it is important to update all national sustainable development strategies and poverty reduction strategy papers to incorporate climate change, and to identify priority policies for reducing vulnerabilities while providing indicative estimates for the financing requirements of such policies.**

B. For the Economic and Social Council

40. **The Economic and Social Council should continue efforts to prioritize discussions on sustainable development, especially on processes relevant to the follow-up of the Bali process. The Council can play an important role in**

coordinating the technical research and policy recommendations of the various functional commissions within its purview. In particular, the Council should consider devoting attention to cross-cutting dimensions of governance and State capacity in assisting Member States in dealing with sustainable development challenges.

C. For the United Nations Secretariat

41. **The United Nations Secretariat should assist in the dissemination and exchange of best practices and support capacity-building initiatives in governance and sustainable development, including climate change. The Committee may request the Secretariat to bring the conclusions drawn from its discussion on this item to the attention of the Economic and Social Council during the high-level segment of the Council's substantive session of 2008 and during the Council's annual ministerial review of the progress of Member States in achieving the internationally agreed development goals on sustainable development.**